

Time Together :  
A survival guide  
for families and friends  
visiting in Canadian  
federal prisons

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Regroupement canadien d'aide aux familles des détenu(e)s



**Time Together : A survival guide for families and friends  
visiting in Canadian federal prisons and  
The Directory of Canadian Organizations Providing Services  
to the Families of Adult Offenders  
by Lloyd Withers.**

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visiting in Canadian federal prisons**

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## **Time Together**

By the time you have reached this page, you will already have discovered a number of things :

*You are sentenced along with the one that you love. You will do the same amount of 'time', and usually harder time. You may be facing financial difficulties, emotional trauma, assumption of a single parent lifestyle, community ostracism, and uncertainty and fear in dealing with an intimidating correctional system.*

*It is difficult to maintain any relationship these days. It is more difficult with the added pressures and stresses of being involved with the criminal justice process. Some relationships survive and some do not. For some relationships incarceration may be an end to a cycle of abuse.*

*Family support is important, both while the one you love is in prison and upon release back into the community. You provide a balance to institutional life. There is someone out there who cares and who is waiting for their return back into the community. You may also live in the hope that criminal activity will cease, or the fear that it will continue.*

The most significant needs of families are access to good information, support, and referral to individuals or organizations who understand the unique family dynamics associated with a family member being incarcerated. You (and especially your children) need help through the initial anxiety of visiting your loved one. You need accurate information on how correctional facilities operate and how to maintain contact with your loved one.

This handbook is intended to help you understand a complex correctional system. It will give you a greater understanding of the difficulties that you will have. It will help explain to you what your children are experiencing. It may help you to maintain and strengthen your relationship with your incarcerated family member.

This handbook has some limitations. It is difficult to capture everyone's experience. We apologize if some sections of this handbook may not be inclusive of your experience when, for example, it reflects a partnered relationship or when it discusses children and incarceration. You may be the father, mother, brother, sister, child or friend of the person inside. This handbook still has important information for you.

Wherever possible the language is inclusive.

## Roller Coaster Ride

Not all institutions look the same, but this will give you a glimpse of what it is like to visit:



What is it like to visit a family member or friend in a federal correctional institution?



Walking through the metal detector  
All visitors, as in airport security, walk through a metal detector.



Signing in at Visitor Security Control.  
Visitors must complete a Visiting Application Form prior to visiting ...



Signing in at Visitor Security Control.  
Visitors must complete a Visiting Application Form prior to visiting ...



and have two pieces of identification, including I.D. with a photo, when signing in.



Many institutions require visitors to reserve a visiting time prior to the visit, by phone or in person.



**Searches and Visitors.**  
Personal items are scanned through an X-ray machine.



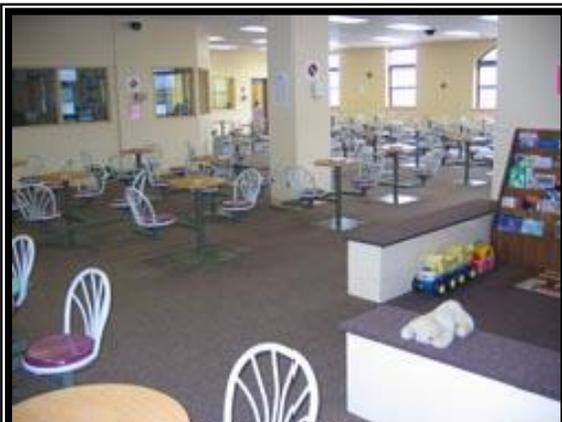
Some items are swabbed and tested for drugs using the Ion Scanner. Drug dogs may also be used.



A positive indication by the Ion Scanner or drug dog leads to a 'Threat Risk Assessment' interview.



The interview can lead to closed visits, loss of visits or criminal charges. Drugs in an institution puts everyone's safety at risk. One person or parent in prison is already one too many.



**Visiting Area.**  
Visits are about 1-3 hours long, usually 3 times per week.



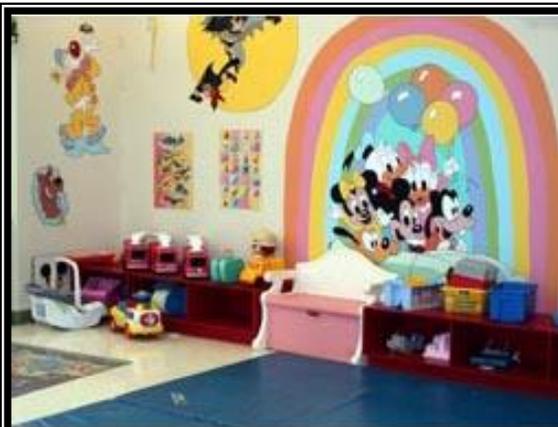
Visits may be open (contact) visits, closed (non-contact) visits or Private Family Visits. Many institutions also have special seasonal family visits.



Visitors may be under audio and video surveillance.



Children's Activity Area. Some activity areas have a TV and VCR.



Toys and games help to normalize a family relationship during a visit.



Some institutions have an outside visiting and play area.



Visitors can bring change to purchase coffee and food from the vending machines.



Playing together helps strengthen family ties and parent-child bonds.



Private Family Visiting Program.  
Eligible families have 72-hour  
PFV's every 3-6 months.



PFV's may be denied if there is  
violence in a past or current  
relationship, a negative community  
assessment, or security issues  
related to drugs or contraband.



Each PFV has a TV and radio  
in the living room.



Families prepare their own meals  
in the PFV kitchen.



A crib for the baby,  
a bed for an older child.



A typical bedroom in a PFV.

You are separated from your family member on many levels beyond your physical separation. Both of you will experience a wide range of emotions and experiences related to this separation. Research on the effects of separation show that when the reason for the separation and the length of the separation are known, stress is significantly reduced. The experience of stress increases when there is uncertainty about the physical and emotional well-being of the separated person, their location, when their return is uncertain, or when the next visit with them (if at all) will be.

It only takes about 30 days for your family to restructure itself. It has to restructure in order to survive the demands, decisions and obligations of the new roles and routines imposed on it by incarceration. The wind keeps blowing, the river keeps flowing, and life must continue on. Your children continue to grow and change. So will you. Your partner needs to understand this and congratulate you for doing what you need to do in order to survive. For your loved one inside, time may feel like it stands still, and incarceration has sometimes been described as being “caught in a time warp.” This difference in how you experience time may be disconcerting for both of you.

This stress will follow you and your family throughout the period of incarceration and into your family member’s return and reintegration. Following the initial joy of reunion and reintegration, your returning loved one may want things back ‘the way they used to be’ as if time hasn’t passed. Difficulties arise without careful communication and understanding on everyone’s part. Your family will restructure itself again to include your returning loved one. But it will never be ‘the way it used to be’. Everyone grows and changes. Everyone may feel both diminished and enriched through the changes and stresses. You may find yourself able to do things and cope with situations that you may not have thought possible.

Reunion brings hope, but if separations occur frequently, such as if your loved one’s parole is revoked or if there is renewed criminal activity or a new offence, you and your family go through another roller coaster ride of stress. Your loved one will have to do their part to grow beyond behavior that leads to jail. Only then will this particular roller coaster ride come to a stop.

## The Emotional Cycle of Incarceration

### **Arrest, Trial and Sentencing**

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Grief and loss</b>                | <b>One week to one year or more</b> |
| <b>2. Detachment and withdrawal</b>     | <b>One week to one year or more</b> |
| <b>3. Renegotiation of relationship</b> | <b>Variable duration</b>            |

### **During Incarceration**

- |   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <b>4. Emotional disorganization</b>     | <b>First 6 weeks of incarceration</b> |
| <b>5. Renegotiation of relationship</b> | <b>Variable duration</b>              |
| <b>6. Family stabilization</b>          | <b>Variable duration</b>              |
| <b>7. Anticipation of reintegration</b> | <b>Last 6 weeks of incarceration</b>  |

### **Parole/ Re-Entry**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>8. Renegotiation of relationship</b>   | <b>First 6 weeks home</b>                 |
| <b>9. Reintegration and stabilization</b> | <b>6 to 12 weeks home, up to one year</b> |

The emotional cycle of incarceration (the emotional roller coaster ride that you experience) tends to follow some predictable ups and downs. Each phase has its demands and stresses. The following table gives some guidelines, but should not be considered as set in stone for you or your family. You and your family will progress through each stage in your own time and at your own pace.

### **Arrest, Trial and Sentencing**

#### **1. Grief and loss.**

This stage lasts from one week to one year or more. It stretches through arrest, remands, trials, and sentencing. It may last until your loved one is finally in the institution where they will commence their sentence. This stage is filled with feeling the grief that accompanies any loss. Some of these emotions include disbelief, anger, hurt, sadness, and depression. You may have clinged to the hope that the courts may find your family member innocent. You may find it very discouraging when they did not. It is important to build your personal resources and to fill your life with people who care. Reach out for help.

#### **2. Detachment and withdrawal.**

Your loved one was found guilty. You may find yourself not wanting to see your loved one. You may even get into arguments with your loved one

for no apparent reason. You may question your relationship and whether to continue it. Many relationships end at this point, especially if the hurt is deep. The family's resilience is used up.

This is all part of coping. You need the distance as your 'emotional bank account' may be empty and you need to build up your internal resources. You may feel hurt and betrayed because of the criminal behavior of your family member. You may feel hurt because this is not the first time that you have done time. You thought that your family member might have learned the first time to get out and stay out with no more crime and no more victims. You didn't want to be hurt again.

This is the point where you make a choice to 'do your time.' It may take some time before you are ready to make this decision.

Talk about your choices with someone who understands.

### **3. Renegotiation of relationship.**

So you've decided to do your time along with your family member who is incarcerated. You've decided to continue the relationship. You will find that you are stronger than you were before. You will need the extra energy for what is coming next.

## **During Incarceration**

### **4. Emotional disorganization.**

Just when you felt some peace, once again it feels like pieces are flying out all over the place. You may experience all the emotions that you felt during the arrest and trial all over again. Hang on tight during this part of the roller coaster ride. It sets the stage for making it work and the changes that you will have to make in your life. You and your family will begin to restructure to continue on. Take good care of yourself first. If you don't take good care of yourself, you won't have anything left over for your relationships.

### **5. Renegotiation of relationship.**

You will find yourself asking your family member some tough questions about whether they are in the programs that they need yet, started school in the prison, etc. You want to make sure that your family member is using their time to learn what they need to learn to get out and stay out. You want to

make sure that he or she is 'using their time' or 'making their time work for them. You also want to know that your decision to 'do time' was not in vain.

The relationship will also get renegotiated because of the high financial cost to you of maintaining the relationship. You will quickly learn that the cost of long distance telephone charges and travel for visiting is very high. Sometimes in their loneliness, your family member may want to call or visit more often than you can afford. It will be important to reach an agreement around this and many other issues.

It will be just as critical to stick to the agreement that was made. It is very important in this stage that you are sensitive to power and control issues if there are demands that you do not have a life beyond the prison. You are not in prison, and do not get negotiated into a situation where it feels like you are under house arrest, waiting for the phone to ring.

## **6. Family stabilization.**

You have made it this far. Congratulate yourself! The bumps don't feel quite as drastic any more. You have found out who your friends are. You have found out those who aren't friends. You are getting on with life and into a new routine of family life and maintaining contact with the one that you love by mail, by phone, visiting and perhaps through private family visits. Your loved one needs to congratulate you on how well you are doing. It's tough out there, but you're making it work.

## **7. Anticipation of reintegration.**

You've talked about this, dreamed about this, and hoped for this. It's coming soon, and you don't know if you can handle it. Don't forget that you may experience 'false homecomings', in that eligibility dates do not mean that your loved one is going to be released on that date. Eligibility dates are only the earliest possible day or full parole dates. Parole hearings, parole decisions, and your loved one's programs and progress shift these dates forward and back. It's not real until you see it on paper, despite your hopes, dreams, and plans.

Did your loved one really change? Will they stay out of jail? You will be filled with a mix of emotions that you haven't experienced for a while. You will re-evaluate your relationship once again and ask yourself whether it is better if they don't come back. Don't beat yourself up! This is 'normal'.

## **Parole/ Re-Entry**

### **8. Renegotiation of relationship.**

They are finally back, even if it is to a halfway house! The roller coaster is about to begin again. You and your family have restructured in order to cope with your loved one's absence. Now many things will have to restructure again to include everyone. It will take negotiation and compromise.

Don't forget that you have coped just fine, thank you very much.

Things have changed. You have changed. Don't forget that the time warp in which your loved one was caught may not include or incorporate the passage of time. Be patient with each other. Search out help when you need it by continuing to use your resources.

### **9. Reintegration and stabilization.**

You finally made it. You deserve a little stability. Enjoy your life together. Keep building a positive relationship : reintegration and a stable relationship may take a year. Keep working at your relationship.

Don't become complacent. You know the warning signs that might indicate relationship difficulties (or a return to the kind of activity that can lead to doing time again.)

## **Children and Prison**

Children's responses during the emotional cycle of incarceration may vary from aggression and acting out on one end of the spectrum to withdrawal and depression on the other end. Your child's response will depend on many things, including age, prior relationship to the incarcerated parent, if your child witnessed the arrest, the type of offence or crime committed, whether your child was involved in the offence, if your child is lied to about incarceration or the offence, if your child experiences changes in care (new home or school, moving in with a relative, foster care, economic changes), and the degree to which the offence was publicized in the media.

### **Children Helping Children**

**By Telia Smart**

My name is Telia Smart and I've grown up with a unique perspective on life, having to go through unique and trying times.

As a child of barely seven years old, the unimaginable happened. A man I loved, and, who was the only man who stepped up to the role of a positive and caring father figure, was put on trial and imprisoned. He was taken away from me and I didn't know why. I couldn't understand how a man who brought so much love and joy into our family would ever be put in a prison. That's where the bad guys went, not him.

I am 17 years old now and I'll be turning 18 in two and a half months. I still visit my step dad and have never left his side. Even though my mother had only been dating him for one year before he was incarcerated, we decided as a family that he was a part of our family and we would stand by him through it all. In some ways we're grateful for this experience because it has brought us closer together, and stronger as a family. You learn to communicate, a gift not all families share, because in a visit room setting it is all you have to do.

There are many things that still surprise me today. A child going through such a devastating experience as incarceration of a parent should not be subject to questioning, ridicule, and/or be outcast over a situation that is not of their doing.

Children are not guilty of the crime their loved one was convicted of. Many people seem to forget this fact.

I can guarantee the following statements will go hand in hand if people in the community hear about a child with a parent or loved one who has been incarcerated. People like to ask as many questions as they can, to find out about that person's case, making it a very difficult and stressful situation for a

child to be faced with. Others are curious to know what it's like to go inside a prison and what sort of things go on in there.

One of the questions that may upset a child the most, because they visit someone on the inside, is if any sort of criminal acts have been forced upon you. These questions are understandable if asked by police officers, lawyers, or judges. But when it's your neighbours, teachers, classmates, and friend's parents, it is not acceptable. Questions like these can make a child feel intimidated, and worthless. As a child, you feel you have no voice against an adult. They are the ones in charge and you have to listen to what they say, and talk to them even if you don't want to.

Ridicule is another factor that comes into play. Many people will try to sway the child to hate the person that's incarcerated and disapprove of the parent bringing you up to the prison to visit them. This can make a child feel like there's a boundary up between the society and their family, because of a prison wall. A child shouldn't have to feel like they live in a prison themselves. Other people may make crude jokes and taunt them about the child's family, or situation as a whole. Both child and family may be perceived as something below "proper society level" because they choose to remain a constant support for a loved one.

To be outcast is a difficult issue for anyone to deal with, but imagine a child who has lost a loved one by imprisonment and that has been outcast for that reason - and that reason alone. An example of this is when other mothers will distance their own children from the children who's family member is in prison, because they feel that they must be bad, and do not want such an influence like that on their own children.

In the visiting area a child has to learn some proper prison etiquette very quickly. These are some things a child should never have to learn, but they must know for visiting inside the prisons. They must always be cautious of what they say; perhaps a meaningless joke can lead to separation of their loved one because their visits have been revoked. You learn who sits where and you never sit at someone else's table. You don't whistle and you do not talk about other people's cases unless you have permission from them. I know some of these examples may seem like minor things, but if you don't follow these rules it may be taken as a hostile act and may result in threats of physical harm toward the person who is incarcerated.

A child who has to live through this life feels very alone and cautious of everyone around them. They may feel that society is teaching them that to love and support someone who's done something wrong is not proper and will have

consequences. It can build strong emotions such as depression, anxiety, rage, regret, guilt and a sense of worthlessness.

Society is only beginning to see the possible harmful effects that having a loved one in jail can bring a child. So they are beginning to bring in programs for children who have a loved one in prison : counsellors, youth care workers, and summer camps. There are also other programs to help support the family with care packages on occasion and some newly developed programs for families as a whole, or just spouse relationships support groups. These ideas are a good step in the right direction. As a child going through this for almost eleven years now, I have taken part in some of these programs and have found that they are good ideas but are somewhat inadequate. I have needed someone who understood me, and what I was, and am still going through; those workers have no experience with this kind of life and so there was no way they could understand where I am coming from.

The most healing work I have ever done  
was when I was with other children  
facing similar situations. We would discuss events  
we had gone through and  
understand each others' pain.  
We were not outcasts with each other.  
We were not judged. We were just simply kids  
who had a loved one in prison.

I am glad that more and more services are becoming available to children, but I don't believe any true healing will begin until children of similar situations can be brought together to heal each other. The foundation of such a program would be run by adults, with the involvement of young adults who have gone through this sort of experience during their childhood and have ideas that can help children feel safe, wanted, comfortable, and able to communicate about how they feel. The programs can be overseen by children (ages 16 and up) who have experience with incarceration. This program would be about children with more experience helping younger children; but even the older kids would meet others of their own age and start healing themselves as well. From life and self-experience I have realized that children will often share their feelings and get to the roots of issues if they are just talking to other kids. This program can be proven to be a very healing and informative process for everyone. Perhaps a committee can decide events a group of children may be able to do together such as : movie nights, games night, arts and crafts night and a night

where you can receive help for your homework. These are just example ideas of some of the things that could be done to help bring children together.

People are always saying that children are our future. Well it takes a community to raise a child, let's not leave any of them out. To better ourselves, and our community, we must better the situations for our children. We all share a role, what will yours be?

Thank you for considering my proposal and hearing the voice of a child.

## **Telling the children**

It is a difficult decision to tell children that a family member, particularly a parent, is incarcerated. Parental shame or fears that your child will think less of the incarcerated family member can interfere with appropriate discussions. While it is ultimately a parent's or care giver's decision to inform the children, there are several issues that must be considered. Here are some hints :

If children are not given an answer or a plausible explanation, they may fantasize their own explanation to fill the void. Children may blame themselves and feel that they have done something wrong that contributed to the incarcerated parent being absent.

Children are also smart. While they can be convinced that the incarcerated parent or family member is in the hospital, working for the government, on vacation, or in school, the child may become mistrustful or confused by the discrepancy between what they are told and what they experience. Additionally, it is better for a child to find out that a family member is in prison from a care giver rather than in the school yard or in the media.

In telling a child that a family member is in prison, it is important to keep the explanation simple and age-appropriate. Generally speaking, a 'keep it simple' explanation includes a declaration of the incarcerated parent or family member's love and care for the child, a statement that the incarceration is not related to any fault on the part of the child, that the incarceration is due to the incarcerated parent making a mistake that lead to incarceration, some indication of the duration of the absence of the family member from the child, and a description of any future contact between the incarcerated parent with the child by mail, by phone, or in visitation. Consideration can be given to

include the incarcerated family member during the explanation, if you or the courts decide that there will be parent-child contact inside an institution.

There needs to be preparation and time to answer your child's questions about prison, prison life, the crime, and the safety of the incarcerated parent. It is better to say "I don't know" and to find the correct answer for your child. Some children will not ask questions at the time of the explanation but pose questions over the course of many days as they incorporate the information and any feelings that they may experience. Children may also need guidance in terms in how to deal with stigmatization and teasing that they may experience in the playground. If the child is told to not publicly share information that a parent is incarcerated, the child may need to be given a plausible explanation to share with others. Children at school are aware and accepting of single parent families and non-custodial parents living in other communities. It may be enough to tell your child to share with others that the parents are separated. It may not be surprising that the responses and concerns of children of incarcerated parents can bear striking similarities to the responses of the children of separating and divorcing parents.

You as a parent or care giver may need to be aware of any attitudes and behaviors that are passed to the children during the explanation. Prisons are not normal places to be and criminal behavior is not appropriate. The process of talking with the children is to normalize their experience and feelings without normalizing prison or crime. It may be important for you to sort through feelings and the explanation that you will use with a care professional.

Some print resources available to assist in telling children about the incarceration of a family member include *Let's Talk About You're your Parent is in Jail* by Maureen K Wittbold, *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson, *Stars and Stuff* by Katherine Paterson, *Help for Kids* by Carole Gesme and *Keeping in Touch by Long Distance* by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondga.

While not a predictor, research has shown that children with an incarcerated parent may be more likely to come into conflict with the law later in life. An interruption of a potential cycle of intergenerational criminal activity is necessary for effective crime prevention. Telling the children may start the process.

## **Should the children visit?**

School commitments, traveling difficulties, and other commitments and activities may mean that you will visit without your children. If your partner was close to the children before, your children may want to visit. Your partner may want them to visit and will want to be involved in decisions about the children. Maintaining a relationship and family interest is important both while doing time and upon release. Prisons, however, are not ‘normal’ places to visit and can be a particularly difficult experience for children. Your children may display behavioral difficulties, restlessness, become argumentative or withdrawn before during or after a visit. Some institutions now have a children’s activity center to assist in keeping children occupied during visiting.

Some families choose not to visit during the course of a short incarceration or during a suspension. Children may want to visit notwithstanding your concerns as a parent, and it may be important to honour your child’s wish to visit. While it is ultimately up to you as a family or caregiver, be as open and honest as possible with your child concerning the absent parent to lower stress, fear and anxiety.

## **Should I move closer?**

There is no simple answer to this question. It needs to be an individual decision based on your specific situation. It is important that you make the decision on what is best for you and your family, not on the basis of what your loved one inside desires or demands. It is up to you to ensure that you, and particularly your children have stability and continuity. Moving to a new community means leaving existing family or community support systems, perhaps leaving a job, or accumulating further debt or financial difficulty. It means added stresses on school age children. You have already gone through a stressful and traumatic time during arrest and trial. Moving is an added stress. Hold off on making a decision until it is confirmed where your family member will do their time. It is important to remember that they will move from one institution to another throughout their sentence. Do what is best for you and your children, and that may be what is best for your incarcerated loved one.

## **Reintegration and children.**

It is a tough job being a parent. The following is a summary on how your child's adjustment may be shown through different emotions or behaviors. What you may find is that the following descriptions, hints and suggestions are important for your family throughout the emotional cycle of incarceration.

Younger children and infants may feel insecure and want reassurance that the returning parent will not leave immediately. The child may cling to either parent or become anxious when the returning parent leaves the room. Feelings of fear and anxiety may cause the opposite behavioral response and the child may withdraw from or avoid the returning parent. The child may treat the returning parent as a stranger in the house. Some lingering anger may lead to aggressive behavior.

Older children may feel anxious at the changing roles in the family upon reunion. There may be feelings of competitiveness between the oldest male child and a returning father. Older children may suddenly have behavioral or educational difficulties. When a family restructures, there may be a testing of limits, playing one parent off against the other and jealousy. Feelings of jealousy may be felt toward the remaining parent and siblings for the returning parent's time. A child may be jealous of the returning parent who is now spending time with the remaining parent.

Observing your child's behavior will give you some ideas of the issues that you may need to discuss with your child. Talking with your child may be the best solution for speeding the adjustment to the reunion. Active listening is always the best parenting skill you can offer any time.

Sometimes fears and feelings present themselves in an occasional bad dream that is resolved with a hug and a glass of water. If bad dreams are persistent or intense, a first step is to talk with your child using your best active listening skills. Even young children can benefit from talking about their worries. It is helpful to use stories as discussion starters. Give yourself plenty of time to allow your child to share their feelings both about the story and their own experience. Two helpful stories are *Bartholomew's Dream* by Patti Farmer and *How to Get Rid of Bad Dreams*, by Nancy Hazby and Roy Condy.

Certain bedtime snacks may be associated with bad dreams in your child. A light snack that is low in sugar may be better than a heavy snack. Bedtimes

are also times to avoid scary stories or exciting activities. A bedtime routine and schedule are helpful. A visit to your family doctor is an important necessary step when dealing with chronic bad dreams.

Dreamcatchers are a native Canadian craft, traditionally made from a small branch, sinew, beads and feathers. This simple craft can be made with your child as a focus activity to talk about bad dreams. It is hung in the window of a child's bedroom and bad dreams get 'caught' in the web of the dreamcatcher. The bad dreams evaporate when the sun comes up. Good dreams can find their way through the web and ensure a peaceful night. Another useful tool is 'monster spray', a simple plant mister filled with water that is left near your child for the night just in case they need the reassurance that they can 'spray' the monsters away.

Some nights, you may feel that you need a dreamcatcher in your window and your own bottle of monster spray. Take good care of yourself in order to take good care of your relationship with your children and your partner. If you don't take care of yourself first, you may have little left over for the important people in your life.

### **Children and visiting.**

A Visiting Room is not a normal place to maintain family contact. It is a challenge to be a family in this situation. Your child may find everything confusing and stressful before, during and after the visit.

Your child may become bored quickly. This is a difficult parenting task to keep active children from interrupting others. Visitors at other tables may feel uncomfortable or intruded upon, and vice versa. There are often limited activities or toys in the Visiting Room.

One of the things that you as parents need to sort out is : “Who is the visit for?” While the two of you may desperately want some time to yourselves, your starting point is that you are parents. You are responsible for your children. Your children will demand your time. Give it freely! Children pick up very quickly on whether they are wanted or included. This is also true during visits. If your children are with you, then the visit needs to be for the children. If you need time as a couple, then arrange for alternate childcare such as a babysitter, bartering with a friend to babysit their children, arranging for a visit when the kids are in school, asking a relative, or whatever other

arrangement that you can make. All couples with children have a difficulty arranging for time as a couple. It is more difficult in the situation for you as parents coping with incarceration.

There may be limited contact between an incarcerated parent and their child. Reasons may include the distance, the cost of visiting, children in school, and so on. The same strategies that you as an incarcerated parent may use are the same as those used by a parent in separation and divorce or a parent who resides in another part of the country. For a child, emotional distance may be felt more sharply than physical absence : a child will feel loved by a parent a thousand mile away but will feel rejected and abandoned by an non-involved parent who lives around the block.

You may be able to dream up other solutions, but here are the most common ones used by incarcerated parents, depending on the security level of the institution :

*letter writing*

*picture drawing*

*photographs of the parent in the bedroom*

*celebrations of birthdays, special events through handmade gifts/cards, etc*

*telephone calls*

*sharing TV programs at the same time then discussing them*

*reading a bedtime story over the phone*

*Big Brothers or Big Sisters for the child*

*family snap shots*

*share stories that you have read or write stories for the child*

*have children draw pictures of what they have done and what they have been involved with*

*share something new that has happened in the community or their family life*

*plan conversations*

*discuss positive things that are going on*

*read a story onto audiotape and send the tape and the book to your child*

*take care of yourself*

*tell child that you love them*

*tell child that it is not their fault that your incarceration took place  
tell child, in age-appropriate ways, that you are addressing difficulties  
that brought you to prison*

All of these examples can be used in maintaining your partnered relationship. You and your partner may also benefit from relationship enrichment workshops. Several institutions have successfully offered workshops, often sponsored by the Chaplaincy or Personal Development Department.

### **Children of separated and divorced parents.**

Your relationship with your partner is over. You don't want to see your family member but the children do. For you, continued contact between your former partner and children is not acceptable. You may require legal advice to limit contact. Your former partner, now or still incarcerated, may be granted access through a court order or legal agreement. While continued contact may not be your first choice, you do not have to attend or supervise the visit. You have a number of options. You may not incur additional expenses depending on the court order. The incarcerated parent may be required to pay for any transportation or supervision costs, depending on the court order or legal agreement.

Supervision options include your local community's supervised access or visitation program. This service is provided by mediation services, counseling services or another community agency. This assistance is made available to separated, divorced and in some cases incarcerated couples where a court order or legal agreement has limited or required supervised access by either partner for a variety of reasons. Often this is a pay-per-use program, but the persons providing supervision are specifically trained professionals. You often bring your child to the supervision office and the professional takes the child to the institution and returns to the office where you will pick your child up. While the supervising agency carries liability insurance, you will need to sign a waiver allowing the agency to act on your behalf during the supervision.

If you choose to have a relative bring your child to the institution for visitation, the institution may still require you to sign a waiver stating that

your relative is acting on your behalf as guardian during the visit and may require a copy of the court order granting access. This ensures that visitation is not occurring without your, or the court's, prior knowledge and acknowledgment. The family member will need to complete a visitor's clearance form and be notified of clearance prior to reserving a time for the visit.

If a child is 16 years old or older, the child can complete their own security clearance form and visit on their own.

Your institution may have other suggestions or programs, including trained volunteers who, with your signed waiver, will supervise the visit.

### **For Parents : If Your Child is Incarcerated**

Mothers and fathers of someone who is incarcerated face many difficulties and challenges. This includes wrestling with questions like "how could this have happened" or "did we do something wrong." There is often no answer to the first question, but the answer to the second question is that most parents do the best that they can with the resources that they have. Parents are not to blame, even though mothers, fathers, partners, even children, are held responsible or blamed by members of the community. Family members are hurt first by the criminal behavior of the offending family member, then by community attitude. Family members did not commit the crime that sent the offender to prison.

#### **Dear Son, By Linda Love**

I will always remember the day you were born. It was a beautiful fall evening in 1971, and your father and I, your grandparents, and family and friends waited for the wonder of your arrival. You were our first child and your birth made us a family. I could not believe that something so wonderful and joyous could come from such pain.

You truly were a child of love. Wonder and delight marked your early years. The birth of your sister was as joyous for you as it was for the rest of us, and in every way you were her big brother. You watched over her and you loved her with the same gentleness and care that you displayed to the world around you.

As you grew into a young boy, you continued to bring joy to all of us and we reveled in the gift of being a family. I have often looked back to those early years and questioned whether it was really as wonderful as I remembered.

Have the events of the last decade caused me to view the past through rose coloured glasses? I do not think so. Our memories are true and they are real. We were a family who cherished our life together.

*So the inevitable must be asked.  
Where did it go wrong for you my son?  
When did our love and our joy  
in being a family stop being enough for you?*

In truth, my search for answers has ceased. This is now my reality. Your teen years took you away from us, from the values we had instilled and from the circle of protection we fought so hard to surround you and your sister with. It was not enough for you. You wanted to try it all, have it all and live in the moment. You could not wait until you were grown and you made choices and took risks you were not ready to handle. You chose not to listen, to heed our counsel and that of others and we all live with the consequences of your choices.

The day I came to accept that you had committed murder, taken the life of another human being, will forever be the day a part of me died. My head knew that the murder was real long before my heart came to accept the truth. You were my child. You were not just the fruit of my womb; you were the child of my heart. If part of me could commit this heinous act, how could I go on? How could I still love you? I have never been able to put myself in the place of the mother of your victim because to go there is to know the end of all that I believe and love of life.

The long trial, the camera crews who chased us down the street and recorded our tears, the daily front page newspaper stories and the curious who judged me with you, have forever changed the way I view the world. The harshness and indifference of the legal process has caused me to be cynical and I do not trust. I remember crying in the Remand Centre at seeing you behind glass, disheveled, confused and frightened. I remember the man who told me to get used to it. I would be judged as a criminal because you were a criminal and you were my son. You gave me these gifts but I do not thank you for them.

Somehow we survived those first years, we fought to keep you alive and to bring you to prisons closer to home. We didn't know how to do anything else. You were our son and our love for you did not die the day you committed murder. The first five years you spent in prison were about survival. You surviving being in prison and us surviving you being in prison.

***I have learned  
humility, patience and perseverance  
and I have given up things like  
dignity, arrogance and judging others.***

We learned “the system” and how to use that system to get what we wanted : having you in a place where we could provide the support needed if you were to come out of prison a whole person. We learned about which prisons were the worst and which were better. We learned what it would take to get you closer to home and we used every lesson and all the resources we had to do what we believed was best for you. We learned that our life will forever look different from that of our friends and their families. We do not make new friends because we do not trust what will happen when strangers learn about you. We plan our weekends around visiting hours at the prison. It has been a long eight years in prison for all of us.

Through it all we knew that we really had no more control now, over what you were doing, than we did when you were a teenager. Ironic isn't it? If you had accepted our support and help when you were a teenager, perhaps you would not need it now.

But really my son, we do only what little we can and we know that you are really the one who does it all. While all around you, ugliness and hurt prevails, you make the best of the worst. You continue to grow and learn despite the best efforts of the world to keep you down. You take every opportunity to continue to become the wonderful whole human being you have always had the potential to be. You have not lost your gentleness and your wonder with life. You have accepted responsibility for your actions and you are moving forward. You challenge yourself to reach higher and grow stronger. You continue to amaze us with your openness, your willingness to risk and your self-evaluation. You do not always choose the easy road.

It may seem strange to many, but I am proud of you. You are a person worth knowing and I am glad that you allow me to be a part of your life. Who would have guessed that again, something so joyous and wonderful could come from such pain?

I love you son,  
Mom

## ONE DAY AT A TIME

By Linda Linn

What's getting me through the experience of having my son incarcerated? My faith in the God of my understanding that He will not give me more than I can handle.

Our lives were changed forever on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1997. My oldest son came into the bedroom early in the morning, almost on his knees. He had heard on the radio that my third son "L" had been involved in an armed robbery the previous night and two women had been murdered in the prairies. Sources informed us that my son was still at large and there was a manhunt going on. Even the "sources" couldn't get it right. I called the RCMP in my hometown and they said they didn't know anything; I was to call the radio station where it was reported.

We learned later that my son had surrendered earlier the previous night and the co-accused was still at-large. My thoughts and feelings were all over the map. I was angry that "L" had lied to me the previous weekend. "L" was supposed to be going to Vancouver Island to look for work. How did he land up in the Prairies? How could one of my children take another life? He wasn't brought up that way. Where do I start to find out where he is? I needed to talk to him. I wanted to know that he was okay.

I found out over the next few days who were my friends and who weren't. I had over 200 phone calls in 2 days, from friends and family who were expressing their support for our family and a few who didn't. People sent cards and food. Most people didn't know the whole story. People believe everything they read in a newspaper. That was a really big lesson for me. Now I read the paper with the blinders off. I had to finally grow up and find out what "unconditional love" was all about. I had rediscovered my faith a few years earlier and I feel today that I was being prepared for that day. I wasn't filled with shame, I could hold my head high as I knew I had done everything I could to help my son.

An RCMP officer was assigned to the case in our hometown. There were search warrants, and interviews. There were meetings with Government officials to review the case, as my son had been involved with Youth and Family Services. Where had Youth and Family Services broken down? What didn't I do? "L"'s father was living out of the country but he had heard about the incident before I did and was on his way home. The questions kept coming.

I was on a research mission. Who do I talk to about what was happening with my son? What were my son's rights and what was I allowed to do? I did not want to jeopardize my son's case so I spoke to lawyers in my hometown. I

asked for releases from my son so I could speak directly to the doctors, nurses and lawyers involved in his case. The more questions I asked the more I learned about the Justice System. I feel that I was able to cope with people because I immersed myself in the case. I feel that I was my son's advocate. "L" had never been in trouble with the law and we learned some very hard lessons. Everything you say will be used against you in a Court of Law. No one could give me a book to read.

The Victims Services Program has **nothing to support the accused families**. Since I was out of the province they provided a female worker during the trial, but couldn't explain what was in store for me. When my son was sentenced, it was recommended that he be moved to his home province. It took a year and a ½ before he could be moved "home". I had a Private Family Visit with "L" while he was out of the province. It felt "normal" for us except for the head counts. When he was transferred he was so happy to "come home". We were ecstatic. We could see him more often. I hope to be able to move to the Lower Mainland so that I can be closer to my son.

I've also talked to people who have been in my situation. They gave me information about what to expect when I go to visit; the questions I had were common. I went on the Internet, seeking information about Corrections Canada. I contacted the John Howard Society and they informed me about the Canadian Families and Corrections Network. I am a member and read the Newsletter regularly. I want to stay involved.

I have made it my priority to include "L" in our family. I write as often as I can when he doesn't call. I try to have contact at least once a week. I take pictures of our family, pets, and hometown to keep him involved. We still love him, and we need to show him. I travel hours to see my son, and I become anxious until I get there, as I don't want to disappoint him. He has had enough disappointment in his life. I pray to God every morning and thank him every night for my courage and strength to carry on.

## **Maintaining A Partnered Relationship**

If a relationship is to work, it takes work (and play). It is difficult to maintain a relationship with the added pressures and stresses of incarceration. Research on maintaining a happy relationship, regardless of age, has shown that the primary factors are love, respect, consideration, communication, loyalty and trust. For partnered relationships, sexuality is also included (but rarely as first) among those factors already listed.

In some ways each of these factors is a form of multilevel communication made up of feeling words, thinking or belief statements, and through action or behavior.

Take love as an example. How can I tell my family member that I love them in a way that they won't misunderstand or misconstrue? Try something like saying "I love you. I think that you're a special person," then give your partner a hug. Notice how the verbal statements use "I" language. There is no mistaking the communication of "love," particularly if it is congruous with other parts of the relationship.

Mixed messages sometimes given during communication. It is difficult to believe that someone loves you if they say, "I love you," and then ask you to do something that you don't want to do or does something that doesn't speak of love. Listen for communication on all of the levels : mixed messages can be veiled manipulation.

Communication cannot be underestimated in a relationship, particularly in a long distance relationship. There is little privacy however in letters, phone calls, or visiting rooms, but communication needs to continue. It is important to share what is going on and not shield your family member from life and family realities. You may fear that you might make the time harder or that the realities might be difficult to hear, but life events are realities nonetheless. Talk about the difficulties at work, financial difficulties, grades, car troubles, or whatever the issues are. It often helps to make a list before a phone call or visit so that you don't forget important things to discuss. Make some of your discussions a "hopes and dreams" discussion as well.

Discussions need to be open and frank. Use the "I" rule of active listening : I think that ..., I feel that ..., etc.. The "I" rule will short circuit miscommunication, prevent verbally injuring your family member (and vice versa), limit blaming language and projecting one person's stuff onto another.

Communication skills are learned and require practice. Some institutions have couples workshops to teach active listening and communication skills.

## **Sexuality**

Sexuality as a form of communication deserves some comment here. First, note that sexual intercourse is only one part of sexuality. Sexuality includes hugging, kissing, hand holding, verbalization, and other touching. In the visiting room, the most that is allowed are perhaps a hug and kiss at the beginning and end of the visit. Anything more will bring an announcement for your family member to report to the officer in charge of Visits and Correspondence. Respect the other people having visits around you.

The experience of sex and sexuality is influenced by many physical and emotional components. Some components include the ability to form good one-to-one relationships with the opposite sex and the ability to get along well with peers. If there has previously been a good sexual relationship, then there will tend to be a continued good sexual relationship. Men more than 40 years of age who have had a traumatic loss of a previous partner may experience some difficulty with sex and sexuality.

The experience of sex and sexuality can be influenced by excessive anxiety and guilt feelings, excessive partner anger, if a relationship is already chaotic, fatigue, use of substances and medication, if there is an extramarital affair, or if there are some mental health issues.

If you are involved in private family visits, it is important that you be patient and understanding. Difficulties may arise simply because of the stress and anxiety of preparing for the visit, the trip down, coming into the prison, searches, cranky children and the list goes on. As was already stated, some visits don't live up to expectations and in these cases, patience, awareness and understanding are needed. Generally speaking, if there has been no previous sexual difficulties and if both of you feel sexually attractive and can create a loving atmosphere, your experience of sexuality will be pleasurable. Continuing difficulties may require intervention or assistance.

## **Family violence**

Family violence needs to be mentioned here. Family violence can take many forms other than physical violence, including economic abuse, using threats and coercion toward you or your children, intimidation, emotional

abuse, minimizing and blaming, destruction of property, and restricting your movement or associations with others. It is important for you to know that family violence does not stop unless there is outside intervention. Ask for help.

## **Reintegration**

Many couples rehearse or daydream during the empty spaces of doing time. In the happiness of reunion, some of these daydreams burst quickly. One example is that struggles present in a relationship before incarceration may reappear upon your partner's return. Another example is that you have assumed most roles and responsibilities, and you have been succeeding. You may even feel a little uncomfortable about how well you are coping in your partner's absence. It does not mean that you love your partner any less. You have found a way to continue. Your partner needs to congratulate you for the job that you have been doing. Reunion will involve organizing family life again to include your partner. You, your partner and your relationship will be different because of what each of you have experienced during incarceration.

There are many things that can extend the joys and reduce the stress of reunion. It will require patience as you talk through such things as needs, wants, making decisions, use of time, parenting, and resolving disagreements. Hang in there : you can get through it with support and understanding from your partner, family, friends and other available resources. A list of the resources is found at the end of this handbook.

## **Private Family Visits**

Private Family Visits (PFV's) are generally allowed once every two months for up to 72 hours. This is determined by the number of prisoners in the institution and the number of PFV units at the institution. PFV's are two to three bedroom fully furnished units with a living room and kitchen and often with washers and dryers. There are many rules governing behavior in the PFV, including excessive noise, passing items to participants in the other PFV units, supervising your children, cleaning the PFV at the conclusion of your visit, and institutional counts.

PFV's can be an expensive oasis for you as a family. PFV availability is difficult to arrange with work schedules, school schedules and the high costs involved. You are responsible for all costs, including food for your children.

You must complete an application form to be considered for a PFV. Generally speaking, you are eligible for a PFV unless : your incarcerated family member is considered at risk for becoming involved in family violence, or is in a Special Handling Unit, or has been granted unescorted temporary absences for family contact purposes. You will also undergo a Community Assessment by a parole officer who will determine the names of all those who will be in the PFV, any previous criminal records related to drug or alcohol offences, any special visitor needs such as medication, and a discussion of safety concerns including previous family violence.

Your incarcerated partner will receive a written approval or denial of the PFV application, with a right to appeal to the Warden.

### **Advocating for yourself and your loved one**

Families often require assistance to ‘creatively complain’ in order to resolve disputes, conflicts, difficulties, or to access information. Creative complaining means to open a non-aggressive line of communication to constructively raise an issue and bring the concern to a resolution. It means to express a concern in such a way that the issue is the problem, and the you are not seen as a problem simply because you raised the concern or issue.

Your first task, in most cases, is to ask yourself a lot of questions before you ask someone else a question. You will have to categorize your concerns to decide how you will proceed. Is this :

*a concern that affect you*

*a concern that affects your relationship with your incarcerated family member*

*a concern related to your family member, their incarceration, and parole.*

Some comments are necessary here about concerns that your family member asks you to look into on their behalf. Some people doing time become dependent on others for things that they can do for themselves. Be careful that you are not doing your incarcerated family member's work for them. Has your incarcerated family member done their own asking yet, or asked but didn't like the answer. Is your family member providing you with the correct or complete information (ie. Is the file really sitting inactive on the parole officer's desk)? Are you being asked to chase down information that

your family member can get, or to resolve a matter that your family member could resolve? Has your family member provided you with all the information that you need? Have you seen the court transcript, the list of parole eligibility dates, or the report? Is your family member using you as a lever to attempt to influence a decision maker (by the way, this may be OK, except for the 'using' part. You need to be an active and willing participant. Family support is important. You are an important part of your family member's life and have an important role to play.

You also need to realize that information cannot be shared with you if it has not been authorized in writing by your family member. For example, has your family member authorized the sharing of information with you that was used by the Parole Officer in making a decision?

If you have gathered enough information to make an informed complaint, then let's take a look at some steps that you can take next :

### *Step #1. To whom do you need to talk*

To whom do you need to talk : Visits and Correspondence, Parole Officer, Warden, Chaplain? You may want to phone ahead to find out who is the best person with whom to address your concern. Is that person available if you want to meet with them or can you resolve it on the telephone? Make an appointment. This approach will save you telling your story to persons who may not be able to assist you. Most of what you are 'creatively complaining' about can get resolved quickly by knowing who the right person is to whom to talk, ask, or write.

### *Step#2. Be clear*

Be clear about what your concern is and what you are asking for. Don't wait until you have a shopping list of complaints or concerns. Write down what you want to say. Ask for one or two things, maximum, because everyone, including yourself, can become confused if you ask for more. There will be other days. Rehearse what and how you are going to state your concern. Practice with someone else prior to speaking with the person to whom you will address your concern.

### *Step #3. Wait until you are ready*

Wait until you are ready. Creatively complain when you are motivated and have some extra energy to spare. Don't proceed when you are fatigued or

overly stressed. On the other hand, don't wait until the concern becomes a crisis.

*Step#4. Be calm*

Be calm. Don't confuse assertiveness with aggressiveness. Stick to the facts and avoid name calling, finger pointing, abusive language, swearing, innuendo, or ultimatums. What your listener will remember is your aggressiveness rather than your concern.

*Step #5. Have a solution in mind*

Have a solution in mind. If you have a solution, then suggest it. You may have thought a long time about the concern and how to resolve it. Check out your solution with someone who will disagree with you if they think that your solution is not reasonable.

*Step #6. Listen to the response*

Listen to the response. Give the person you are talking to the same opportunity that you want : to hear what they have to say. Be prepared to compromise.

*Step #7. Follow up your discussion*

Follow your discussion up with a letter that summarizes EXACTLY what was agreed to by all parties and send a copy to someone else if you feel that you need to do so.

*Step #8. Next step*

If you are unable to bring your need to resolution or if you are not pleased with the final outcome, then the next step is to decide if it is a 'stand-or-fall issue'. If it's not worth it then let it go. There will be other days. If you want to continue to complain creatively, then find out who is the next person up the ladder, whether it is at the institutional, bureaucratic or political level. Contact a community resource. Contact the Correctional Investigator. Contact legal counsel. Creatively complain to them.

*Step #9. Personal support*

Join a support group organized by a local community agency. It may not address your particular concern, but you will meet with individuals who

understand and are supportive. If you learn to support yourself first, then you will support your family member better.

### **Attending Parole Board Hearings**

Family support is important at parole board hearings. While some decisions are paper decisions, and made without either you or your family member meeting face to face with the parole board, you can request to be present at parole board hearings or you can prepare a letter of support and mail it to the National Parole Board and the Parole Officer. If you attend the hearing, it is important for you to realize that you will have to prepare what you are going to say and provide it to the Parole Board prior to the meeting. You will only be able to speak when called upon, and then only to read what you have prepared. While the process may feel rigid, you have the opportunity to inform the parole board of your support for your family member now, and how that support will assist your loved one in maintaining parole, employment, and a crime-free lifestyle.

Some family members have had rude awakenings at parole board hearings, particularly if the family relationship began during incarceration. Your incarcerated family member may not have shared everything about the offence. You may not have asked. Wanted or not, you will hear it in a parole board hearing. It is better that you know beforehand. Ask to see the court transcripts from the trial. Your loved one will have, or should have, a copy.

### **Visiting in a prison**

Canada has a progressive public policy and practice in comparison to most nations. Many countries, including many states in the United States, do not have private family visits. You have a right to be treated with respect. The federal Canadian correctional system has in place policies that provide for visiting practices and procedures in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA). The Correctional Service of Canada places a value on the maintenance of prisoners' family relationships and on parent-child contact and facilitates the development of family-based programming by institutional programmers, nonprofit organizations, and private agencies. There are still issues to be resolved between policy, practice and programs.

Visiting the one you love in an institution is a different world and maintaining family contact in a correctional facility can be intimidating.

There are formal and informal rules and regulations that are often only learned by accident or experience. You may have concerns about fickleness or vindictiveness on the part of correctional staff and feel that rules are not easy to understand or don't make sense. You may fear that if you question rules and regulations or advocate for yourself or your imprisoned loved one, that the 'system' will exact some kind of retribution that will interfere with your visiting or with your loved one's living conditions. You may also fear for your loved one's well-being. You may travel hundreds of kilometres to be informed that they will be on closed visits or that visits are canceled because of a lock down.

The behavior of your family member within the institution also affects you. Your visit may be under careful scrutiny or surveillance. Any suspicion or conviction of your introducing contraband into the institution will determine if you have open visits, closed visits, private family visits, or temporary termination of visits.

### **Types of Visits.**

**Open (Regular) visit.** A visit in which you and your family member do not have a physical barrier dividing you. You are able to touch each other.

**Closed (Non-contact) visit.** A visit in which you and your family member have a glass barrier separating you. You may be on closed visits because your loved one has not completed the assessment process at the institution, because of disciplinary restrictions on you or your loved one, because you have not yet received clearance for an open visit, or for the protection of your loved one from other prisoners

**Special visits and socials.** Special visits are granted for unique family reasons, and are granted upon application. Family members may sometimes attend group socials for programs occurring in the institution.

**Private Family Visiting (PFV's).** All federal institutions have houses or trailers where couples or families can visit for two or three days. Private family visiting is reserved for the couple or family upon application and authorization.

### **Visiting List, Visiting Hours and What to Bring**

You must be on the visiting list of the person you are visiting.

Visiting hours vary according to the institution. Some institutions require you to phone ahead to ensure space is available. Visiting hours for the institutions in your visiting area are found at the end of this survival guide.

You will need to carry identification with you to identify yourself at the main entrance to the institution. You can bring change in for vending machines, usually \$8.00 per person to a maximum of \$20.00 in coins only.

You can bring diapers, baby food, wipes, and a change of clothes for small children.

The best guide is 'nothing in, nothing out.' For example, depending on the security level of the institution, you are not allowed to bring in or out food, beverages, board games, cards, books, toys, papers, pens, or colouring books. Anything you bring to the institution that is not allowed will be locked up in a locker at the main entrance to the institution.

If you are bringing cash, cheques or money orders for your loved ones institutional inmate account or for hobbycraft purchases, declare the money to the correctional officer at the main entrance (Visitor Security Control) of the institution. If you take it further than the main entrance, then it will be considered contraband. Introduction of contraband can result in the termination of your visits.

You have a lot of preparations to make even before you get to the institution. Some suggestions to prepare for your visit include :

1. Check your car's antifreeze/coolant level, oil level, and make sure you have enough money and gas to get there and back. If you are using a transportation service, make sure you know the departure times there and back.
2. If this is your first time to the prison/ jail, make sure you have a map or good directions. If you don't know where the institution is, call the institution for directions. It is helpful to phone ahead at any time to check visiting hours or book visiting hours if you are required. Travel with a copy of the institution's address and telephone number.
3. You may want to take extra clothing, shoes and toiletries with you if you are staying overnight.

4. If you are staying over night or visiting over a weekend, reserve a space at the local hospitality house or motel before you leave. Have a name and address of a nearby motel even if you are not planning to stay overnight. Surprises or unexpected events happen.

5. If you are allowed to bring in change for the coffee and vending machines, have money in the proper denominations.

6. Have proper and valid identification : drivers license, birth certificates for children, marriage certificate, visitor authorization, a letter from a legal guardian/lawyer if the children you are bringing to visit are not your own.

7. A small wallet, zip lock bag or carrying bag for change, identification, and other items is sometimes handy and will speed up your trip through the scanner.

8. Remember the diapers, wet wipes, and food for the baby.

9. Don't leave articles in your pockets.

10. If you are travelling with children, be prepared with some activity ideas for your children. They may find the trip and the visit long and you don't want to disturb other visits. Visits don't allow much privacy at the best of times.

11. Be prepared to wait.

12. Bring a positive approach to the visit. Knowing that you're loved and have support can make a world of difference to someone who is incarcerated.

13. Try to keep your sense of humor and don't expect too much or try too hard. Visits often don't live up to expectations.

14. Bring honest communication to your visit. It is sometimes helpful to have a list of things in mind that you want to share or may need to discuss.

15. Physical contact during your visit in the visiting room is a 'touchy situation.' The institution may allow a hug and kiss at the start and finish of the visit and hand-holding in between. Anything more can result in a warning or termination of visiting. Some institutions discourage children from sitting on laps as well.

16. If you don't know, ask.

17. It is worthwhile for your first few visits to keep your eyes and ears open. Pick your associates wisely. You may have to make some difficult choices if you ask someone for a ride or give someone a ride.

Be aware that you may experience some depression and sadness immediately following a visit.

### **One Person/ Parent in Prison is Enough.**

You are searched for contraband at all institutions in varying degrees. You may have to pass your personal belongings through a metal scanner or have your belongings searched. You may have to present identification that is tested for contraband drugs with an ion scanner. You may have to walk through a metal detector or be scanned with a non-intrusive hand wand by a correctional officer.

The use of ion scanners or narcotic detector systems are attempts to reduce drugs coming into the institution. The devices are seen as a deterrent to those visitors who feel coerced into introducing contraband. The devices are a non-intrusive (ie. There is no physical contact to your body) test that detects trace amounts of drugs on personal belongings. Drug dogs may also be used.

A "hit" will lead to a "Threat Risk Assessment" interview to assess why the machine may have registered a banned substance. If you think that you have had contact with anything that might lead to a "positive hit" tell the officer, such as if you or your children are on any prescription medication. You may want to carry with you a list of medications that you are required to take.

If there is no reasonable explanation established by the Threat Risk Assessment, you may be placed on closed visits, be asked to leave the institution, be asked to submit to a strip search or you may be held until police arrive.

If your family member respects you, then they will not pressure you to break the law and introduce contraband into the institution. Hopefully, your family member's activities inside the institution are not raising security concerns about you.

Regrettably, some visitors attempt to smuggle drugs. There have even been instances where children have been used to carry drugs in. While some visitors feel coerced by the incarcerated family member, or are told that they must try because of debts that their loved one has built up inside, the results are almost always the arrest of the person attempting to introduce contraband, or violence inside the institution. Besides, it is more traumatic for a child to have two parents in prison than one. One person or one parent in prison is enough!

### **Searches and the CCRA.**

Be aware that you can be asked to leave or can be asked to submit to a search if you are suspected of attempting to introduce contraband. The following section of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act deals with searches of visitors outlines, in detail, what the institution is able to do to search visitors :

*59. A staff member may conduct routine non-intrusive searches or routine frisk searches of visitors, without individualized suspicion, in the prescribed circumstances, which circumstances must be limited to what is reasonably required for security purposes.*

*60. (1) A staff member may conduct a frisk search of a visitor where the staff member suspects on reasonable grounds that the visitor is carrying contraband or carrying other evidence relating to an offence under section 45.*

*(2) Where a staff member :*

*(a) suspects, on reasonable grounds, that a visitor is carrying contraband or*

*carrying other evidence relating to an offence under section 45, and believes*

*that a strip search is necessary to find the contraband or evidence, and (b) satisfies the institutional head that there are reasonable grounds*

*(i) to suspect that the visitor is carrying contraband or carrying other evidence relating to an offence under section 45, and*

*(ii) to believe that a strip search is necessary to find the contraband or evidence,*

*a staff member of the same sex as the visitor may, after giving the visitor the option of voluntarily leaving the penitentiary forthwith, conduct a strip search of the visitor.*

(3) *Where a staff member believes on reasonable grounds that a visitor is carrying contraband or carrying other evidence relating to an offence under section 45 and that a strip search is necessary to find the contraband or evidence,*

*the staff member may detain the visitor in order to :*

*(i) obtain the authorization of the institutional head to conduct a strip search, or*

*(ii) obtain the services of the police; and*

*(b) where the staff member satisfies the institutional head that there are reasonable grounds to believe :*

*(i) that the visitor is carrying contraband or carrying other evidence relating to an offence under section 45, and*

*(ii) that a strip search is necessary to find the contraband or evidence, the institutional head may authorize a staff member of the same sex as the visitor to conduct a strip search of the visitor.*

*(4) A visitor who is detained pursuant to subsection (3) shall :*

*(a) be informed promptly of the reasons for the detention; and before being searched, be given a reasonable opportunity to retain and instruct counsel without delay and be informed of that right.*

### **Special Family Situations**

You may be a family member of several groups that experience special difficulties in maintaining family relationships. These groups include lifers and long term offenders, elderly family members, family members of women prisoners, if a family member is a victim of the offence, or if you are separated or divorced from your family member and you have a child that wishes to visit.

In 1998-99 there were 2229 men and 52 women serving time for first and second-degree murder. Most of the victims were known by the perpetrator of the offence - the majority of the victims were partners, former partners, family members or intimate friends.

Sex offences of a predatory nature occur, but many sex offences occur within a family, kinship or trusting relationship. Like the families of lifers, families for whom a family member was a victim of the offence face the decision of whether to maintain or terminate family ties.

Two researchers, Robinson and Taylor, found that one in three federal male prisoners had indicated that they had been violent toward their family

member. Furthermore, one in three married male prisoners had been violent toward a female partner and one in five had been charged for the offence. Almost half had repeated the violence with more than one partner. Incarceration may bring an end to a cycle of violence within the family. Robinson and Taylor raise the concern that violence will be repeated in future relationships if there is not treatment.

There is a detrimental effect on a child that is a victim of violence or a child that has witnessed violence within the family. This is cause for concern. A child who has witnessed family violence may be at risk for continuing the cycle of violence in their relationships later in life.

A recent phenomenon is the growing population of elderly offenders. Both the family and the correctional institution will need to concern itself with the elderly offender with respect to health, geriatric and palliative care, as well as the prisoner's adjustment to the prison environment. The family of the elderly offender may never have had previous conflict with the law, and may have had significant social or religious status in the community. The stigma felt by the family associated with the offence can be significant.

Family members have a difficult choice to make : will they continue in a relationship with the offender. This is a deeper and more profound decision when the family is the primary victim of the offence, such as in homicide, sex offences against a family member and domestic violence. Some family member may choose to continue in a supportive relationship with the offender. There may also be conflict within the family over maintaining contact or providing support to the offender because another family member was the victim.

It is a difficult emotional dilemma.

## **Lifers and Long Term Prisoners**

The families of lifers and long termers face some serious choices early on. This is going to be a long haul. Life Line is a specialized program aimed specifically at lifers and long term offenders and their families. After 15, 20 or 25 years behind bars, your incarcerated family member has some unique difficulties in reintegrating into the community and into family life. The Life Line staff have been there, done it, and can assist your family member through it.

Earlier in this survival guide, the idea of a 'time warp' was mentioned. The world keeps changing, but your incarcerated family member may not understand the scope or speed of change. While your loved one may be aware through the media of the changes, there is often a culture shock experienced. This experience is very similar to the experience of visiting a foreign country after reading all the travel brochures and watching television specials.

In prison, your family member knows who they are : they are known, they have status, people know them by name, they have friends. Upon release, the structure and emotional protection provided by institutional life changes all that. The world becomes impersonal. No one calls them by name. Some lifers and long termers attempt to recreate their institutional world at home, even to the point of limiting furniture, darkening windows, locking doors, asking permission of you to check what is in the refrigerator. In the worst case scenario, your family member searches out persons whom they knew from inside. These individuals may provide a sense of place and short term support, but may not offer the kind of support that your family member needs.

Your family member's skills and job experience are negatively affected by the length of incarceration. Again, the Lifeline program offers assistance while your family member is inside and can establish employment support prior and following release. While there has been continued discussions about correctional program opportunities, many programs only become available later in the sentence. Your family member may find this discouraging and disheartening, as may you. While it is true that there will be plenty of time in which your family member can complete necessary programs, the onus may rely on your family member to search out possibilities and courses. Your family member, as the saying goes, "needs to do the time rather than the time doing him (or her)." Doing the time does not mean 'kicking back' : it means taking charge of a life that has become out of control.

It is important for you to encourage your family member to establish supportive contact right away. Doing life or being a long term offender is a difficult journey in which your family member must confront their crime and

its consequences and will have to confront themselves. They face a serious amount of time.

They may have to face the victims of their crime on a continuing basis. Victims are notified of significant milestones throughout the sentence such as when the parole board considers judicial review, parole, temporary absences, work releases, etc.. The long-lasting effects of the crime on others means that there will be a long-lasting involvement of victims throughout the incarceration.

If you are in a partnered relationship with a family member who is a lifer or long termer, your relationship may have begun during incarceration. You need to be prepared for the long haul. You need to go into your relationship with your eyes open. Consider reading the transcripts from the trial. It may prepare you both for your relationship and for any publicity that may appear in the media at a later date. You may also need to know that just as some partnered relationships don't survive arrest, trial and sentencing, some relationships don't survive release into the community. Those who have entered into relationships during incarceration find that the relationship flourishes during the controlled and structured environment of an institution but were not able to contain the discovery of undisclosed information or the difficulties of restructuring at release. This comment is not intended to say that a relationship begun in prison is doomed at release. It only means that you and your partner have some hurdles to overcome. Build supportive resources into your relationship right from the start.

## **A Sentence That Never Ends**

All families affected by criminal behaviour and incarceration of a family member face some similar issues and dilemmas. For the family of someone who has taken another's life the difficulties may be significantly greater. The consequences of the crime never go away for them, for the lifer, or for the victim's family. Each one faces a sentence that never ends.

This is not an exhaustive analysis of the issues facing families of lifers. It is only a glimpse at some of the issues that follow the confusion, contradictory information, lack of information or support, hopes and desperation of the arrest, trial and sentencing.

Families of those serving a life sentence are not a homogenous group - each family's experience is different and the difference needs to be honoured. One reason for the variation in family experience is because there are different types of lifers. Some are lifers due to a 'crime of passion' in which a partner, intimate, former partner, another family member, relative or friend is the victim. Some are lifers due to a mental health issue, and the final group is the criminal lifestyle/subculture lifer in which a life was taken in the course of another offence, in a gang- related murder, and so on. This spectrum of lifers means that there is a spectrum of issues facing families of those serving a life sentence. These issues can be daunting, and include the following:

As identified in a recently released Statistics Canada report ([www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/040705/d040706a.htm](http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/040705/d040706a.htm)) about 33% of the violent crimes in Canada that lead to homicide and to a life sentence are against a spouse. The shock and horror of the offence rocks the entire family. In fact, the StatsCan report points out that only 21% of violent crime in Canada is 'stranger violence' in which the victim and the perpetrator do not know each other.

There are radical changes in the relationship between the lifer and their children. Children lose one parent to murder and the other parent to a life sentence. The children's relationship with the lifer is altered forever. It may be irreparably so. One person that the children love has taken the life of the other person that they love. For some children, the emotional impact can destroy any wish for contact with the incarcerated parent. The trauma of witnessing the murder or discovering the body of the murdered parent can lead to lasting trauma.

There are radical changes in living arrangements. In the murder of a parent, children may live with grandparents or other relatives who are also coping with loss and impact of the offence on themselves. The children may not want to maintain contact with the lifer, or the grandparent or caregiver may not wish to foster or support contact based on decisions related to what is best for the children.

There is often conflict within the family about providing support or visiting the lifer. Some family members may feel that support should not be offered, given the nature of the offence. They may be openly be critical and attempt to dissuade other family members from maintaining contact.

For some lifers it may be a parent who maintains a family relationship, including being the caregiver for their grandchildren. There is very little support for parents, and even less if they become guardians of the grandchildren. Often social support services are geared to a parent and child and not to a grandparent and child.

The family cannot avoid anything related to the offence. They live daily with the consequences of the offence and with the repercussions within the family. A lifer may not understand, or be ready to understand, the impact of the offence on the family, particularly their children.

The family and the lifer will maintain their relationship for at least two years within a maximum security institution. Only after this two-year minimum can a lifer be sent to an institution that has lower security. Nothing can change this - there is no fast tracking of lifers in the correctional process.

If the lifer committed murder as part of a sexual offence against either an adult or child, the family bears an additional stigma in the community. The stigma can extend into the institution among families who visit. A status or hierarchy, based on the type of offence, exists among families as well. Family may be instructed by the prisoner to not associate with another particular family.

Lifers are held in a certain regard within the prison culture. For example, lifers who commit a crime of passion may be considered "Square John's" or pro-social by other prisoners and thus in some ways exempted from understanding or participating in the prison culture. However, those who commit murder in the course of a sexual offence, particularly against a child, are placed at the lowest rung of the hierarchy and sometimes their family bears this as well, just as in the community.

Community stigma experienced by the family rises during the arrest, trial and sentencing and often diminishes and simmers below the surface during incarceration. The family may experience a return of the stigma as the media revisits the offence upon an application for judicial review, escorted or unescorted absences or upon release into the community. While most lifers do not reoffend, the nature of the initial offence increases societal fears of the possibility of reoffending and its consequences on another victim.

There appears to be something that could be called "pain control." While contact with family and the outside community is needed, visiting is often

stressful for the lifer. This may be because of the security constraints or because of the emotional impact of visiting both on the lifer and on the family. Some lifers and long-term offenders chose to terminate or limit visits and community contact as a form of pain control. It hurts too bad to have visitors or it is very evident that the family continues to live in the midst of the pain of the offence and of the lifer's incarceration. The lifer may not realize that while his or her pain may be lessened by decreasing visits, the family's pain continues, now complicated further by limited or no contact.

Finally, and perhaps much later in the sentence, family needs around the elderly or ill lifer may include palliative care concerns and preliminary grieving issues around an impending death or requests for parole under "Faint Hope."

Kate King, in "It Hurts So Bad: Comparing Grieving Patterns of the Families of Murder Victims With Those of Families of Death Row Inmates" (Criminal Justice Policy Review 15,2, June 2004, 193-211) takes the risk to comparing the experiences of the families of victims of murders with families of families on Death Row. While the reasons for the resistance to comparing these two very different groups are evident, King identify similarities between the two groups. She points out, "As in Smykla's study, the prolonged grieving could be seen in three features shared by virtually all of the people interviewed in this research: self-accusation, social isolation, and powerlessness. Although it may seem more likely that family members of convicted murderers might feel guilty about things they had or had not done, in fact, those close to the murder victims also blamed themselves for what had happened."(p 202).

Other similarities that can be gleaned from King's article are prolonged grief, emotional, physical and psychological difficulties, feeling isolated, stigmatized, ostracized, misunderstood and powerless, feeling forgotten and ignored by the criminal justice system, shock and horror at the offence, searching to understand why the murder occurred, sometimes leading to self-blame or self-recrimination, changes to family structure.

As in the article on Statistics Canada's analysis of homicide, many victims know the perpetrator, and in fact may be a spouse or former spouse. This has significant impact on the children and King cites material prepared by the US group Homicide Survivors Info, "In cases where one parent kills

the other, surviving children often feel revulsion, betrayal, and anger mixed with confusion and grief over losing both parents. These children may feel forced to choose between one parent and the other or may find themselves at the center of custody battles between opposing sets of grandparents. Some children may find themselves in foster care or given up for adoption. These stressors can be utterly debilitating." (King, p.196) In fact, it can be debilitating for the entire family: "The trial process is painful for the family of the accused, just as it is for the family of the victim. In the courtroom, they must listen to graphic testimony about the crime, view photographs of the crime scene, and sometimes endure the hostility of the victim's family. Many relatives of the accused are unfamiliar with the court process and find this time especially confusing and painful." (King, p. 200)

While the death penalty does not exist in Canada, King's article raises some important considerations for the families of lifers. Some of the findings may be applicable to families in Canada who, while they may not be facing the impending execution of the offender, must still deal with the social, emotional, psychological and structural impact of a life sentence. As King also includes "perhaps these families are mirror images on either side of the homicide, both being thrown into a situation of horror and helplessness." (King, p.209)

The 1991 Task Force Report on Long-Term Sentences by the Correctional Service of Canada identified four stages of prisoners serving sentences of ten years or longer:

1. adaptation - coming to grips with the reality of confinement;
2. integration to the prison environment - living within the context of that reality;
3. preparation for release - preparing for release in a progressive manner; and
4. reintegration into the community - assuring a coherent and continuous process leading to safe reintegration.

The stages have been used as a basis for the development of services and programs, particularly for lifers in the LifeLine program.

It can be identified, at least from practice wisdom, that family experience parallels these four stages as well:

1. adaptation - coming to grips with the effect of the offence on the structure of family, intrafamilial relationships and support, and the reality of the long-term confinement of a family member within a maximum security institution;
2. integration - maintaining (or developing) a relationship within the context of a life sentence with lifetime parole;
3. preparation for release - preparing for release, anticipation and excitement at the release with the potential of a reoccurrence of community stigmatization; and
4. reintegration into the community - renegotiation and stabilization of a relationship that has existed within a structured environment for successful reentry into the family and community and within a context of life-long parole.

Some lifers form partnered relationships during incarceration. It may be many years before the test of life together in the community occurs. For other lifers, a partnered relationship existed prior to incarceration and continues. Relationships during incarceration can be overwhelmingly intimate. The many struggles that face relationship maintenance during a life sentence can bind the couple together in a very strong relationship. These relationships need support upon reentry, probably for up to one year or more, as the couple negotiates a relationship outside of the structured cocoon of visiting rooms, Private Family Visits and escorted and unescorted temporary absences. As one family member has said, they need to experience their relationship "in the Real World." This is an important insight for her, and perhaps for others as well - prison is not a normal place to maintain a relationship and the testing of a relationship at reintegration may be much greater than expected.

The family of a lifer - mother, father, children, partner, grandparent, brother, sister or whoever the family may be, face many challenges. The family is doing life as well, throughout a sentence that never ends.

### **The Experiences of a Lifer's Wife By Sherry Edmunds Flett.**

In 1979, as a member of the Queen's University West Indian club executive, I went into Millhaven Institution to the inaugural meeting of B.I.F.A. (Black Inmates and Friends Association). Filled with trepidation and fear, I

didn't know what to expect. I had never been in a prison before. Little did I know, but that meeting would change the course of my life forever.

I was born in Kingston, Ontario to a family that had lived in the city since 1800. Prisons have always been part of the area's social and economic landscape. Riots and other disturbances would be reported in the Kingston Whig Standard. Going into town from the farm, we would drive by Collins Bay Institution or Kingston Penitentiary. A picture taken in the 1950s of my parents playing baseball in K.P. hung on the wall of my dad's office at home. I never thought about the people who lived behind the walls. It was as if they didn't exist.

The West Indian club executive - Angel, Pam and I - were met that first night in Millhaven by the Lutheran minister who had phoned and asked if we would come in. Our identification was checked at the little building at the front gate. I looked up and saw the gun towers as we walked through the two perimeter fences topped with barbed wire. Going down into the institution to the chapel where the B.I.F.A. meeting was to be held, I felt the curious stares and heard the catcalls as we walked past.

B.I.F.A. was founded by a lifer named Roni Grant. He envisioned B.I.F.A. as a group open to all that celebrated Black culture and was a political force in the institutions for people of African descent. B.I.F.A.'s first social convenor was another lifer. His name was John Glendon Flett. A good friend of Roni's and the only person inside that Roni ever introduced me to, Glenn and I hit it off immediately. We wrote back and forth and became friends over time. Eight years later on June 21, 1987, Glenn and I were married in the church at William Head Institution.

I never thought I would ever get married, much less to someone in prison serving a life sentence! It has been an arduous, rewarding journey of highs and lows as with all marriages. Thirteen years later, I am glad we made the decision to marry. Glenn and I have, thanks to God, survived the separation of prison, the transition to the street and have created a meaningful life for ourselves. To others who are in the same situation, there is hope. You can survive as an individual and as a couple. I would like to briefly share some recollections about what we did and how we made it thus far.

1a. Educate yourself! It is critical to know all that you can in order to make an informed decision - especially when you meet the person inside. Before Glenn and I got married, I knew about his crime. I had read the articles in the newspapers. He gave me permission to read his files so I saw his criminal record and knew about his institutional life. I met his family-his parents, his ex wife, his children and his friends both inside and outside prison. It gave me a sense of Glenn as a person. His willingness to share his life with me (and vice

versa) helped to establish open lines of communication that have held us in good stead.

1b. Learn all that you can about prison through articles, books, C.S.C. regulations, and any available community support. This is important and assists you to navigate the murky world of prison. Know the names, telephone numbers, and meet wherever possible, the warden, the case management officer, the psychologist, the Chaplain/Elder, the Visits and Correspondence staff and the regional office of the National Parole Board. This also helps you to establish the fact that your partner has credible community support.

2. Don't isolate yourself. Build a support network. Prison is a shaming experience for all concerned. The more you can name your experience and talk about what is happening to you with people you trust, the easier it is to cope with it all. Often people isolate and think that it is "us against the world." This is a recipe for disaster. Our support network has been a vital part of our relationship. Support is especially important when you are with someone who is serving a long sentence. When they are getting out, community support is crucial.

3. Get used to the fact that Life means Life! Being married to someone who is serving a life sentence is both a blessing and a curse. Right from the start I knew that Glenn's sentence would last for the rest of his natural life and that he would always be under some sort of supervision. In 1992, when Glenn got full parole, there was a category called parole reduced. After five years of incident free behavior, he would be eligible to apply for once-a-year reporting to his parole officer by phone, letter or interview. But the category of parole reduced was cancelled. In its place, a lifer can apply to see his/her parole officer every three months (Glenn reports every month). Like lifters inside the institution, lifers on the street have concerns about continuity of supervision. Glenn has had nine parole officers. Each one has had varying ideas as to how his risk should be managed on the street.

4. Don't think that when they are out that "it" is over. A new chapter has just begun! Glenn used to tell me, and he still does, that a person is at their most ideal while inside prison. Unless someone is totally wild, they have taken programs and made substantial changes. After getting out of prison, this new way of life needs to be reaffirmed all over again. Out in the big, wide world and feeling uncomfortable, your partner will go back and forth as they try on their old skin but they will realize that they like their new self. Sometimes the awkwardness of the changes makes them long for life inside. I can remember when Glenn was out for a year. He said that he couldn't handle life on the

street anymore and wanted to go back in. It wasn't until we were in the Ferndale Institution parking lot that he decided that he wanted to stay out.

5. Intense debate is the order of the day! The longest ongoing argument in our house has been over space. As Glenn got out on escorted and unescorted passes, and then day and full parole, we began to notice that we were both very independent individuals who were set in our ways. While Glenn was inside, my lifelong habit of reading before going to sleep was not a problem. When he got out, however, I lost my side of the bed and Glenn wanted the light out so he could sleep! That Christmas, one of my stocking stuffers was a book light.

I am a messy but clean person. Glenn is very orderly. After twenty-three years in prison, he discovered that you feel better with a neat and tidy cell. As a result, our house is pretty clean even with our three year old running around. We have negotiated that Glenn makes the bed as soon as we are up and I file the piles of paper that appear periodically upstairs.

Glenn has a need for privacy, especially in the morning when he reads his Bible, prays and goes running like he did in prison. I took this as a personal affront. To me, his actions meant that he wasn't happy being around me. The meaning changed when I found out that Glenn needed a place to think. Our first home together was a one-bedroom house situated in an old apple orchard. There was a wood shed out back that I cleared out and cleaned up. I put everything that had been in his prison cell in the woodshed and put a lock on the door. This was Glenn's room. If I wanted to go there, I had to ask him. Woody, an American friend of mine from work at the time, when I told him about Glenn's 'cell', said that he had his bunker at home too. Woody was president of an organization for Viet Nam veterans in Canada. He had survived two tours of duty in Indochina.

For anyone whose partner is just getting out, especially after a lengthy period of incarceration, I would highly recommend giving them a private space to process the experience.

*Sherry Edmunds Flett is the Executive Director of L.I.N.C., Abbotsford, BC.*

## **Issues Surrounding Families of Aboriginal Inmates**

**By Amy Smith.**

Approximately 15% of Canada's federal inmate population is of Aboriginal descent. Statistically, they are the most over represented minority group who is incarcerated within the Correctional Service of Canada. Aboriginal culture is one that is both unique and distinct from all other cultures, nationalities, and ethnic groups that make up Canada's diversity. This uniqueness reflects

strongly on Aboriginal families who are involved in Canada's justice system : many issues faced by Aboriginal families are specific to them.

We must first differentiate the term "family" as often defined by an Aboriginal person. A family may go far beyond the immediate family of wife, children, siblings, and parents. A Native family often incorporates a whole community. A family consists not only of the immediate family, but also Elders, children of the community, neighbors, friends, and all others in between. Justice is often dealt with as a healing process for the community, rather than a punitive one strictly for the offender. The community works together to find solutions to problems and Elders conduct ceremonies that help the offender, victim, and the community as a whole to heal. When a crime has been committed that results in incarceration, the healing process is disrupted for that community.

A specific issue that Aboriginal families of inmates encounter occurs when visiting the offender. Sacred medicines, consisting of tobacco, sage, cedar, and sweetgrass, are burned by Aboriginal people for prayer. An Elder may bring these medicines into the institutions either for their own personal use or to give to the offender. These medicines are usually packaged as a bundle or within a medicine bag and considered are very personal. Although most family members are unable to bring medicines in for the offender, they may be carrying medicines or other sacred, personal objects. If a search of the medicines is required, it should be done with the assistance of a Native Elder or the Native Liaison Officer to ensure that they are being handled appropriately. Some correctional staff, perhaps because of lack of education on Native spirituality, mishandle the medicines and thus interfere with the Aboriginal person's spirituality. The visitor feels disrespected and offended.

Although many Aboriginal people come from urban communities, we must also consider the large number of them who live in remote areas, either on or off reserves. The way of life for these families who live in a northern Native community, for example, is far different from what many consider to be the norm. Many speak their Native language, with little or no English. When this is the case, translation becomes a major issue when dealing with the correctional system. There are many different nations that make up the Aboriginal culture. The many languages make it difficult to find translators to accommodate visitors. This limits many Aboriginal families from visiting at all, or returning a second time due to the immense frustration at not being able to express their needs to C.S.C. staff. This may also be related to "culture shock" of entering a city, not to mention an institution. Frustration is related to the correctional environment as well as the people they encounter within this environment.

Many Aboriginal people (particularly women) are perceived to be very passive individuals. They often do not assert themselves in order to get their needs met. This is not to be considered a fault of Aboriginal people. It is a different way of presenting themselves related to their upbringing and values.

Across Canada, the Aboriginal population has the highest rate of poverty. This poverty often prevents travel for visits or relocation of immediate families to be closer to the offender. Many families live great distances away. Traveling expenses can become very costly and only those family members with the financial means can make these trips. This ultimately causes drifts between the family, the community, and the offender.

Within the Aboriginal culture, Elders serve as teachers, advisors, spiritual guides, and friends. Each nation is connected, but at the same time have their own specific teachings that have been passed down as learning tools. Families of inmates may require guidance and support from an Elder, as they receive at home, when visiting their family. It is often hard for the families to connect with an Elder from their nation in an urban area. Many times another nation is more prominent in that area and that Elder cannot give the family all of the support that they require.

In many Aboriginal communities, drug and alcohol problems and teen suicide rates remain very high. This may be even a greater risk for families and children of offenders, although this has not been statistically proven. Lack of resources and community support for Aboriginals and Aboriginal families may be a contributing factor for these ongoing issues within these communities.

Reintegration is far and beyond the most complicated issues for the Aboriginal offender and their family. Roles within the family must again be defined, as many Aboriginal communities and families incorporate distinct gender roles as part of daily living.

When an offender is being reintegrated back into their community or reserve, the healing process that was interrupted by incarceration must be completed within that community. All of the culturally specific issues mentioned above affect the healing process for the families and the communities of Aboriginal offenders.

*Amy Smith is the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Coordinator at the Katarokwi Native Friendship Centre.*

### **An elderly family member in prison.**

Crimes committed many years previously may lead to an elderly person being placed in prison. It is becoming increasingly common for people who are over 55 years of age to be facing their first penitentiary term. Their length

of sentence may mean that they may face dying in an institution prior to parole or sentence completion.

The Correctional Service of Canada is aware of these developments and is instituting studies and practices to address this. This has led to some experimental units and programs, including training other prisoners in geriatric and palliative care. The institution will ensure that the special needs of your aging family member are addressed, including appropriate housing, meals, exercise, and medical care for aging persons. There will also be ongoing assessment for health, safety, palliative care, and psychological well-being.

You and your family may have had no previous contact with the justice and corrections process. It may be particularly overwhelming for you. You may face significant difficulties in having your family member discussed in the media.

It is appropriate for you to search out both personal and professional support in your community. The resources listed at the end of this survival guide may be helpful. It may also be beneficial for you to do further reading on depression and the elderly. Many elderly people experience clinical or situational depression, and the same is true for those who are incarcerated. If you have concerns that your family member is becoming depressed, contact the health care department of the institution.

Some comments about the elderly and the National Parole Board : age is the greatest predictor of both a ceasing of criminal behavior and low recidivism (re-offending and returning to prison). Few persons who are age 55 or older are likely to reoffend. The NPB's first priority is public safety and there needs to be demonstrated that your family member is no longer a threat to others upon release into the community. The National Parole Board considers, on an individual basis, compassionate release programs or special needs parole for terminally ill, elderly, nonviolent prisoners.

There still may be treatment or programming that your family member must complete. Your family member may also need to consider employment and vocational options. The challenges of being elderly and reintegration following incarceration may be daunting for you and your family member. Whatever the difficulties, one of the significant assets that your elderly family

member has is your continued contact and contact with other community members, both during incarceration and into release and reintegration.

### **Federally sentenced women.**

The family situation of women who are federally sentenced is unique. For many years, federally sentenced women did their time at Prison for Women or at a provincial institution under an exchange of service agreement between the federal and provincial governments. For the many women from various parts of Canada who were sentenced to Prison for Women, it meant little or limited family contact. Family and family support may have been thousands of miles away. Many women were single with children. Partnered relationships often ended with incarceration, or partners were co-sentenced in the offence and children ended up living with a relative of the incarcerated woman or in the care of the Children's Aid Society or its equivalent. Women in prison tend to have less regular visits than incarcerated men. Men tend to be visited by a partner, while it appears that women are visited by a parent, usually her mother, or a partner.

With the introduction of regional facilities, federally sentenced women have the opportunity to live closer to their family supports. There have also been recent developments in the mother-child program such that young children from birth to age three can remain with the mother in the prison (Mother-Child Programs).

### **HIV, AIDS and Hep C**

If you are in a partnered relationship, it is important that you are aware of any behavior that your incarcerated loved one may be engaged in that puts them, and you, at risk of contracting HIV or HepC. This includes tattooing and body piercing, sharing of needles during intravenous drug use, and unprotected sexual activity with other partners.

Do not share other things that may come into contact with blood, such as body piercing tool, drug use paraphernalia, tattoo equipment and ink. Do not share toothbrushes, nail clippers, tweezers, cuticle scissors, razors or any other personal care items that could come into contact with blood. Use condoms for sex.

If you have any doubts that your partner may be engaging in behavior that places you at risk, discuss it with them. Protect yourself.

## **FASD (FAS/ FAE)**

There has been some recent concern about fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and links to impulsive and behavior that lead to criminal charges. While there is still much to be researched, one thing is clear - drinking alcohol during pregnancy may cause a baby to be born with FASD.

According to Health Canada (Pregnant? No alcohol, 2001), a child with FASD may have learning and behavioral difficulties. The child may also look differently than other children. The child may also have difficulties thinking, speaking, hearing or seeing. There is no cure for FASD. It does not go away with age. Only prevention is possible - not drinking during the pregnancy.

## **Institutional and Community Resources**

We prefer to keep up an image that everything is OK. We don't want others to know that we are having difficulties. The very thing we need, however, may be the thing we don't want. We may need to ask for assistance when we feel stuck. It takes a lot of courage to ask for help.

### **Who to call.**

You can call persons in the institution for specific information or to state concerns. Be aware, however, that the persons to whom you wish to speak may not be able to discuss information about your family member with you unless your family member has signed a waiver or authorized the staff member to discuss the issue with you. This practice is intended to protect the privacy of your loved one.

The following is a list of persons you might need to talk to :

### **In the Institution :**

Information on visiting and visiting hours : Visits and  
Correspondence (V and C) officer

Information or concerns about your loved one's institutional and  
parole status : Parole Officer

Family crisis, emergency, or death in the family : Chaplain, Native Elder, Native Liaison Officer. After hours, the Officer in charge of the institution (Keeper)

Complaints about your treatment by corrections staff : The Officer in charge of the Institution (Keeper), Warden, Correctional Investigator

### **In the community :**

Develop your community support early in the criminal justice process, before hardship becomes overwhelming and social isolation becomes a pattern. The incarceration of a family member is a crisis touching every aspect of family life. Support should address emotional, economic, social, and spiritual needs and extend well beyond your loved one's successful reintegration into your family and the community. Community support efforts should include :

***Local support agencies linking your family with local community services***

***Advocates for your family if you face discrimination***

***Counseling, support groups, family networking, recreation services, information, referral, and advocacy, specific to the circumstances surrounding incarceration.***

***Special attention should be paid to the provision of supports and services for the adolescents of offenders***

***Support from your religious community as you face the spiritual crisis of the incarceration of a family member***

***Budgeting and financial planning assistance for basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and transportation.***

The following list of community groups is not exhaustive, but these organizations will be able to assist you directly or refer you to the best person or organization for your particular struggle. More organizations are found in the Directory of Canadian Organizations Providing Services to the Families of Adult Offenders, which is also found in this survival guide.

Helpful organizations include :

*The Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN) provides confidential information and referral through a toll-free Information Line for prisoner families (1-888-371-2326). The Information Line is not a crisis line, but a service to help prisoner families search for an organization, support group or professional service close to the family.*

*The Elizabeth Fry Society provides services to female prisoners and their families. Services offered vary across Canada.*

*The John Howard Society provides services to male prisoners and their families. In some instances this includes court support, prison visitation, family support groups.*

*The St. Leonard's Society also provides services to prisoners and their families, including family support.*

*Catholic Charities may also provide specific support for families in need.*

*Life Line InReach is a support organization that assists lifers and long term offenders and their families. Life Line stresses the importance of their early contact with your family member and with you because of the difficult stresses faced by both of you.*

*The Salvation Army has a long-standing involvement with prisoners and their families. Their services to families include addressing your spiritual needs.*

*Local organizations vary, but look for support from such groups as emergency crisis line, churches and church organizations, community counselling centres, family clergy, family doctor, local Health Unit, HIV/AIDS support organization, Hospitality house/shelter, or restorative justice project.*

Don't forget that friends and other family members can be an important resource to help you through the difficult times.

The greatest danger in asking for assistance is waiting until options become limited or unavailable. The greatest joy in asking for assistance will be discovering that you are not alone.

## Glossary of Terms

**Case management :** The case management process supervises the progress of the person doing time, and makes recommendations for transfer, parole and release. Case management coordinates all relevant information about individual offenders such as institutional progress, sentence progress, institutional charges, and correctional programming to produce a clear understanding of a case at any given time during a sentence. The Parole Officer (Case Management Officer) is a staff member whose duties involve the supervision, rehabilitation and programming needs of the offender in the institution and in the community.

**Chaplain :** A chaplain is an ordained clergy person who helps to meet the religious and spiritual needs of prisoners. This includes organizing religious services and celebrations, visiting all areas of the institution, talking to prisoners about personal and family concerns. Chaplains also assist in informing prisoners about sickness, death or difficulties in their family.

**Community assessment :** A community assessment is a document that details relevant community contacts and community support. A community assessment is based on information gathered through an investigation by a parole officer (case management officer) or by a private agency under contract to the Correctional Service of Canada. Information sources may include family members, community organizations, support groups, and police.

**Community correctional facility/ halfway house :** A community correctional facility or halfway house provides housing and supervision during day parole.

**Contraband :** Contraband is anything introduced into or found that is not permitted in the institution. This includes weapons, drugs and alcohol. Anyone found with contraband or introducing contraband into an institution may be asked to submit to a search, may be charged, and may lose their visiting privilege for a time. A family member who is suspected of introducing contraband may be investigated and/or asked to leave the institution if they do not agree to submit to a search by a same-sex correctional officer.

**Correctional programs :** Correctional programs are programs that the prisoner is required to complete to

progress through the correctional system and to address difficulties as identified by the courts, treatment staff, parole officer (case management officer), or the National Parole Board. Programs range from anger management, substance abuse, family violence education, educational programs, living skills, or psychological treatment.

**Homicide and murder :** Homicide is the general term applied to all situations in which one person causes the death of another. Justifiable or accidental homicide is not a crime. Culpable homicide is a crime. It can be either first-degree murder, second-degree murder, or manslaughter.

Eligibility dates for offenders' sentences for life imprisonment as a minimum sentence before 26 July 1976, vary. After 26 July 1976, legislation was amended such that the two categories of murder (first and second degree) carry specific parole eligibility dates.

First-degree murder includes all planned and deliberate murders, as well as the murder of a police officer, prison employee or any other person authorized to work in a prison while on duty.

Second-degree murder is any murder that is not first-degree murder.

Manslaughter is any culpable homicide that is neither first nor second-degree murder. The judge may sentence a person convicted of manslaughter to any term deemed appropriate, from some number of months to life.

**Institutions - security level :** Prisoners in maximum security institutions are considered to pose a serious risk to staff, other prisoners, and to the community. The perimeter of a maximum security institution is a fence or wall and is monitored constantly. Access by all persons is controlled. Movement and association inside and around the prison are strictly regulated and supervised by direct surveillance, electronic surveillance and physical barriers. Prisoners in a medium security institution are considered to pose a risk to the safety of the community. The perimeter of a medium security institution is a fence or wall and is monitored constantly. There is greater movement and freedom of association in a medium security institution, but gates, barriers and supervision are still present. Prisoners in minimum security institutions are considered a limited risk to the safety of the community. The perimeter of a minimum security institution is defined but not directly controlled by access barriers or gates. Entrances and exits to buildings may have alarms or surveillance. Movement and association within the institution are regulated under

minimal supervision. Each region within the Correctional Service of Canada has a maximum security psychiatric or psychological treatment centre. The Centre may offer assessment, treatment and specialized programs.

#### Judicial review :

In the case of a first-degree or second-degree murder, where the convicted offender is not eligible for parole for more than 15 years, the prisoner may apply to superior court to have the parole ineligibility period reduced or terminated. The 15-year sentence must have already been served before the judicial review. Prisoners who have committed multiple murders are not eligible to apply.

**Offences :** Schedule offences are offences contained in Schedule I or Schedule II of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA).

Schedule I refers to indictable offences under the Criminal Code of Canada. Schedule II refers to indictable offences under the Narcotic Control Act or the Food and Drugs. Non-schedule offence is an offence which is not contained in Schedule I or Schedule II of the CCRA.

If an offence is included in a schedule and the offender meets certain criteria, the Correctional Service of Canada may request that the National Parole Board decide if the prisoner should be detained to the warrant expiry date.

**Parole :** Parole is a conditional release from prison such that the person serves the remainder of his/her sentence in the community. Parole is granted and is not automatic. An eligibility date does not mean that your loved one will be granted paroled on that particular date.

Day parole means that the prisoner is able to be in the community during the day, but returns to an institution (minimum security, community correctional facility, halfway house) at night.

Full parole means that the prisoner can live in their own residence, but reporting to a parole officer continues.

Statutory Release (mandatory supervision) means that two-thirds of the sentence is completed and an eligible individual is released into the community under supervision of a parole officer.

Warrant expiry means that the sentence is completed and there is no supervision or reporting.

**Pardon :** The Criminal Records Act permits the National Parole Board to issue, grant, deny or revoke a pardon to those people who, although convicted of a criminal offence, have served their sentence and have proven to be responsible citizens. If a pardon is in force, a federal agency or department cannot disclose the information contained on file or in records without the permission of the Solicitor General of Canada.

**Segregation :** Segregation confines your family member from associating with other inmates. Segregation is used to maintain the security of the penitentiary or the security of a person. Sometimes called 'Seg' and 'the Hole', it is not actually a hole but an area of separated confinement within the prison.

**Visits and Correspondence (V and C) :** The department in the institution that is responsible for supervision of family members who visit in the institution. Visits and Correspondence is responsible for the Private Family Visiting program and scheduling related to the program. V and C staff receive, search, and distribute mail sent by family members to the prison. More information on visiting is included in the Appendix of this Handbook.

**Warden :** The warden is the individual ultimately in charge of running the prison. The warden makes day to day decisions on operations within the prison, but is bound by the rules and regulations governing the Correctional Service of Canada.

**Women's facilities :** For many years, federally sentenced women in Canada were incarcerated in the Prison for Women (P4W), Kingston, Ontario. Some federally sentenced women also were incarcerated in provincial institutions through an exchange of service agreement with provincial governments. Federally sentenced women are now incarcerated in regional facilities in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.

